

This article is an excerpt from Atomic Habits, my New York Times bestselling book. When I delete social media apps from my phone, it can be weeks before I download them again and log in. These tricks are unlikely to curb a true addiction, but for many of us, a little bit of friction can be the difference between sticking with a good habit or sliding into a bad one. Someone would have a baby and I would think, "I should send a card." But then weeks would pass and by the time I remembered to pick one up at the store, it was too late. The habit wasn't easy. There are many ways to prime your environment so it's ready for immediate use. If you want to cook a healthy breakfast, place the skillet on the stove, set the cooking spray on the counter, and lay out any plates and utensils you'll need the night before. When you wake up, making breakfast will be easy. Here are some more: Want to draw more? Put your pencils, pens, notebooks, and drawing tools on top of your desk, within easy reach. Want to exercise? Set out your workout clothes, shoes, gym bag, and water bottle ahead of time. Want to improve your diet? Chop up a ton of fruits and vegetables on weekends and pack them in containers, so you have easy access to healthy, ready-to-eat options during the week. These are simple ways to make the good habit the path of least resistance. The Path of Most Resistance You can also invert this principle and prime the environment to make bad behaviors difficult. If you find yourself watching too much television, for example, then unplug it after each use. Only plug it back in if you can say out loud the name of the show you want to watch. (Which prevents you from turning on Netflix and "just finding something" to watch.) This setup creates just enough friction to prevent mindless viewing. Nuckols refers to the approach as "resetting the room." For instance, when he finishes watching television, he places the remote back on the TV stand, arranges the pillows on the couch, and folds the blanket. When he leaves his car, he throws any trash away. Whenever he takes a shower, he wipes down the toilet while the shower is warming up. (As he notes, the "perfect time to clean the toilet is right before you wash yourself in the shower anyway.") This might sound like he's just "cleaning up" but there is a key insight that makes his approach different.